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## TESTIMONY OF ANNE LOUISE BLANCHARD IN OPPOSITION TO BILL NO. SB 696, AN ACT EXPANDING THE JURISDICTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES.

I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of the legal services organizations in Connecticut. Legal aid programs in Connecticut provide no cost legal representation to low-income families with civil legal issues. Much of our representation involves assisting low income families to obtain adequate mental health services for their mentally ill children and youth. **We oppose Raised Bill SB 696, An Act Expanding the Jurisdiction of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. We instead urge your support for SB 1197 in the Children's Committee, which helps assure that DCF carries out its statutorily mandated duties in this area.**

As Litigation Director for the state's largest legal aid program (Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.), my colleagues and I have represented numerous youth in the care of DCF over the past 20 years who have mental health issues. These youth are among the most vulnerable people in DCF's care. When there is a dispute regarding the adequacy of the services provided to these youth, the one positive aspect of their being in DCF's care has been the fact that Conn. Gen. Stat. 17a-3 requires DCF to provide services and placements to these youth which are 'clinically adequate and appropriate.' *There is no such requirement in state law for clients receiving DMHAS services.* Consequently, although DCF has experienced many problems providing care to this population, as long as these youth are in DCF's care, they at least have the ability to challenge the type of care DCF provides to them, through administrative hearings or through Juvenile Court proceedings.

DMHAS currently does not have the expertise or the funds to provide appropriate services to mentally ill youth. As many legislators heard at the January 17, 2007 Symposium on Young Adults held at the LOB, DMHAS does not even have sufficient funding to provide Young Adult Services in each of its regional areas.

While the legal services community agrees that this population needs more services and assistance, we do not believe moving these youth to DMHAS will achieve this goal and consequently oppose SB 696. Rather, we should require DCF to comply with its statutory obligation to provide clinically adequate and appropriate services to the youth in its care and require DCF and DMHAS to codify their current Memorandum of Agreement to provide appropriate transition services to this population when these youth reach 18, 19, 20 or 21, as appropriate.

